

Nadler: Health Insurance Reform is Historic Opportunity for All Americans

Sunday, 21 March 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), a longtime proponent of meaningful health insurance reform, affirmed his support for the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act, historic legislation to dramatically improve the nation's troubled health insurance system.

"While the historic legislation before us today is not perfect, it is essential that we pass it," said Nadler.

"Despite my concerns with the bill, our votes today mean something. Our votes today mean that 32 million more Americans will have access to health care coverage. Our votes mean that 45,000 Americans won't lose their lives each year because they are too poor to have health insurance or because their illnesses are too expensive. Our votes mean that the Medicare program will continue to provide important benefits to our seniors. And our votes mean that we will take a giant leap forward in our quest to ensure that all Americans have access to health care that they can afford."

He issued the following statement for the record:

"Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the health insurance reform package before us today because, despite gross inadequacies, it deals with three basic problems.

"We know that 45,000 Americans a year die because they lack health insurance. By extending health insurance to 32 million Americans, most of these lives will be saved. Truly, a vote for this bill is a vote to save 45,000 lives a year. A NO vote for this bill is a vote to acquiesce in these deaths.

"We know that 55 percent of all personal bankruptcies are caused by health care emergencies and that 75 percent of people who file for bankruptcy because of a health crisis had health insurance - insurance that proves inadequate when they get an expensive illness. By banning rescissions, the 'pre-existing conditions' insurance bar, and annual and lifetime caps, and by capping out-of-pocket expenses in new plans at \$6,200 per year for an individual and \$12,300 for a family, with even lower caps for low-income families, this bill will ensure that nobody goes broke because they get sick.

"And the Congressional Budget Office tells us this bill will reduce the deficit by \$138 billion in the first 10 years, and by \$1.2 trillion in the next 10 years.

"Madam Speaker, make no mistake about it: the bill before us today is far from perfect. Like many of my colleagues in the House, I have outlined numerous concerns with the Senate-passed health insurance bill. And with good reason. The Senate-passed bill failed to include a public option, the best available way to refocus our misguided health care approach so that patients and doctors are put ahead of corporate bottom lines. It contained draconian provisions on so-called 'do-gooder' states like my home state of New York. It imposed a new restriction on a woman's access to safe, legal reproductive health care. And it included a disastrous excise tax that would have done more to cost people health coverage than it would to lower the cost of health insurance.

"After considerable struggle and intense negotiation, my colleagues and I were able to ensure that 'do-gooder' states like New York are not punished merely for taking a more progressive stance in the Medicaid system, turning what would have been a nearly \$800 million loss in revenue to the State under the Senate-passed bill into a \$2.1 billion net savings.

"We were also able to reduce the effect of the misguided excise tax, to remove special deals for specific states, to increase affordability credits, to close the Medicare Part-D donut hole that ensnares thousands of seniors, and to include numerous consumer protections.

"And, even with these improvements, Madam Speaker, the package before us today is not perfect. But I am reminded that, when our predecessors cast their votes in favor of Social Security in 1935, they passed an imperfect bill. And when they passed Medicare and Medicaid in 1965, they passed an imperfect bill. And in the years since those crucially important programs were signed into law, Members of Congress who have come after them have made - and will continue to make - vast improvements to those programs.

"Despite my concerns with the bill, our votes today mean something. Our votes today mean that 32 million more Americans will have access to health care coverage. Our votes mean that 45,000 Americans won't lose their lives each year because they are too poor to have health insurance or because their illnesses are too expensive. Our votes mean that the Medicare program will continue to provide important benefits to our seniors. And our votes mean that we will take a giant leap forward in our quest to ensure that all Americans have access to health care that they can afford.

"Madam Speaker, I have spent much of my adult life fighting for universal health coverage. Today's vote doesn't end that fight. But we simply can't lose sight of how historic this moment is. That's why I am proud to cast my vote in favor the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act, a bill that will have immeasurable benefits for the American people for years to come."